

DDP Public Testimony
January 18, 2007

Madame Chair and members of the committee, my name is Francine Sadowski and I am the CEO of Missoula Developmental Disabilities Services (MDSC). MDSC is an intensive service provider supporting adults with developmental disabilities.

MDSC began to provide services in 1990 through legislators supporting the funds needed to create an all intensive community provider allowing adults with disabilities to live outside of a State Institution and become active members of the Missoula community. On behalf of the 62 individuals we serve and their families we thank you for providing the funds to create MDSC.

Now, 16 years later we are back again to request increase funding in order to continue to provide quality services these Montana citizens deserve and require. It is in fact their constitutional right.

The staff at MDSC are dedicated people who only want to provide our consumers with opportunities that will enrich their lives to their fullest potential. Choosing a career in Human Services is not done with the intention of getting rich. We choose this career because we have an innate desire and deep compassion to support people with disabilities in hopes that we can enrich their lives. What we often find is we receive far more from them than they probably receive from us. This line of work is addictive. This is not a typical 8 - 5 job this in fact is our life. When someone is in the hospital or had a bad day, we don't leave it once our shift is over - they remain in our minds and in our hearts. There is an underlying sense of self-worth, outside of wages earned, knowing that what we do matters in another person's quality of life.

With that said, it is also important for people to earn a wage so that they can support themselves and their families. I ask you to support the original amount of \$30 million that DPHHS originally recommended for the Governor's budget. I realize this is a substantial amount of funding but this increase provides supportive data so that community based providers can remain at their jobs they deeply believe is worthy and noble.

At my agency, employees are responsibly to assist the consumers with all aspects of their lives to includes, activities of daily living (toileting, bathing, dressing, tooth brushing, feeding), recreation and leisure activities, job coaching, behavior management, identifying signs and symptoms of illnesses, assisting clients with seizure disorders, diabetics, and the list goes on. They do this job for \$8.12/hr. If you broke down the various tasks into different professions you can equate these activities to teachers, CNA's, LPN's, behavior therapist, recreational therapist, PCA's, speech therapists, and the list can continue. Our employees have to learn a tremendous amount of diverse skills and abilities crossing from one profession to another for \$8.12/hour. You must ask yourself, would you do this type of work for \$8.12/hour. Could you support yourself for \$8.12/hour or approximately \$17,000 per year for a full time employee? Yet, we have

dedicated staff that are willing to provide this service to our Montana citizens and they deserve more.

These same employees could choose another line of work in Missoula. For example, Direct TV recently opened in Missoula with a starting wage of 9.50/hour and the only responsibility you have is selling a product and you can make \$2800.00 more a year just starting out. But, the fact is MDSC has only lost 2 employees out of 180 employees to Direct TV. That is commitment – but it becomes harder and harder to commit to what you want to do and what gives you personal satisfaction when you have to work two to three jobs to make ends meet. What happens then to the employee's quality of life?

The \$30 million dollar increase will allow community providers to increase staff wages, address the rising costs of gasoline, utilities, health insurance, worker's compensation, program supplies used for service delivery, etc. Higher wages will lead to higher staff retention which leads to a more consistent work force which leads to continuity of care and support which leads to a quality of life for our consumers.

The bottom line is that the increased funds will be used for the one thing that matters to all of us – supporting our Montana citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.